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EDITORIAL

Keep military's ban on gays

America's armed forces stand at a crossroads this week, a juncture that will determine whether our military remains the best in the world, or whether its effectiveness will be subordinated to social engineering.

The Clinton administration, in a compromise with Congress, set July 15 as its deadline for announcing its policy of integrating avowed homosexuals into the ranks of the military. If the administration has its way, the policy will fall somewhere between complete integration and a "Don't ask, don't tell" policy that allows homosexuals to serve as long as they keep their sex lives private.

Any attempt to open the military to homosexuals would undermine the effectiveness of our fighting forces, while creating a legal and logistical nightmare.

Granted, thousands of homosexual men and women have served capably in the armed forces. But up until now they have served as soldiers, sailors and airmen, not as gay soldiers, gay sailors and gay airmen who are open about their sexuality.

Such openness would create obvious tensions in the often close quarters of military life, where privacy can be almost nonexistent. Injecting a sexual element into the barracks or the living quarters of a ship would undermine unit cohesion and invite social conflict.

Allowing openly gay men and women into the military would inevitably raise the issue of equity in housing and benefits. It could lead, in our litigious society, to on-base housing and medical benefits for gay "couples."

It would also invite potentially tragic problems with the military blood supply. Homosexual men account for two-thirds of the HIV and AIDS cases in the United States, and account for a disproportionate share of Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B cases — all blood-borne afflictions. With the military service relying on active-duty service personnel for 84 percent of its medical blood supply, encouraging more homosexual men to enlist could jeopardize safety. This would be especially true in combat, where the military must rely on the "pre-screening" of blood to ensure that it is safe for men and women on the battlefield.

The "Don't ask, don't tell" compromise would not fully address these problems. This policy would allow gays to serve as long as they keep their homosexuality private. But such a compromise would not address the problem of blood-supply safety. Neither would it be consistent with the current Code of Military Justice, which states that homosexuality is incompatible with military service.

Nobody has a "right" to serve in the military. Service is a duty and privilege, depending on the national defense needs of our country, not on the desires of individual citizens.

Most officers and enlisted personnel oppose allowing gays in the military not because of fear or prejudice, but because they understand — in a way their commander in chief cannot — the day-to-day realities of military life.

David Hackworth, a retired colonel and the most decorated living American veteran, wrote in the Washington Post against lifting the ban: "I cannot think of a better way to destroy fighting spirit and gut U.S. combat effectiveness . . . Mix boys and girls, gays and straights in close quarters such as the barracks or the battlefield, and both sexual contact and the consequent breakdown of morale are inevitable."

As commander in chief, President Clinton should do everything in his power to maintain the fighting effectiveness of our armed forces. This constitutional duty is far more important than any campaign promise made to please a small but noisy constituency.

er system not part of probe

fice were never listed on the monthly expense report and they, too, lacked proper documentation.

For instance, Milne and other residents question the following expenses: a $42 propane bill when the district doesn't have a propane tank; hundreds of dollars in telephone charges for a number that doesn't exist at the district's office; and "excessive" mileage of about $150 paid to the former superintendent for one week of service within the 1-square-mile district.

"These are things we're trying to substantiate," Milne said. "It's very difficult to trace expenses. We haven't seen very many receipts, just a few figures on scratch paper."

Smith said his office hasn't found any significant problems with the water district's overall budgets for the last three years. However, he said his office usually looks only to see that a district's expenses don't exceed its revenues.

Board backs up documentation

Board members insist they documented expenses. But they acknowledge they are amateurs who found it difficult to manage a complicated water system and a few mistakes could have been made.

"The allegations are totally untrue. This (investigation) is outlandish," said McGilvray, who resigned in late May.

In response to Milne's charges, Howard, the district's treasurer for five years before he resigned last spring, said the propane was used in a heater during a winter emergency to prevent pipes from breaking. Howard said he was unaware of the hundreds of dollars in telephone charges. And, he said, some of the mileage submitted by the former superintendent — who also quit in the spring — were for meetings in Denver and Colorado Springs.

"I know darn well that every dime was accounted for," said Howard, adding that authorization from two board members is required before any money can be spent. "It's sad to me that a few people have brought this up. It hurts the reputation (of board members who also are local business people), and there's absolutely no proof. We're not thieves. It's all a bunch of malicious lies."

Many keep water for rainy day

Dale Peterson, the water district's Colorado Springs-based attorney, said he believes the investigation will clear board members of any wrongdoing.

"Just because someone wants to investigate doesn't mean anything to me," Peterson said. "I'm quite confident the people who ran the checkbook were quite competent. I have a very strong aversion to being tried in the newspaper."

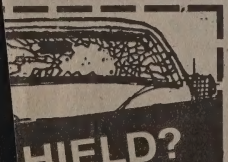
Zook said that while residents are concerned about the new water system that apparently doesn't work properly, that issue isn't part of the investigation.

"If bad decisions were made (by the district's board members), then residents should consider a recall," Zook said. "We don't have anything to do with that. That's a political question, not a criminal one."

Residents say that despite the $1 million water system installed last fall, water lines still leak and three of the district's wells have gone dry. The situation got so bad in late winter that Fort Carson and private water suppliers hauled drinking water to Florissant's 80,000-gallon storage tank.

Residents say they still can't count on having water every day. Many routinely store water in their refrigerators for days when their faucets don't run.

"We're paying twice, and this is one of the reasons why we wanted to look into the books," Milne said. "It's a disaster."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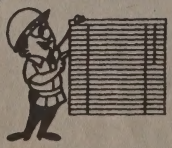
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